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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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The Jerusalem Post reported that Defense Minister Ehud Barak has warned that the transfer of weapons and armored vehicles to the Palestinian Authority could ultimately backfire if Hamas comes to power in the West Bank as then it would be better equipped to turn

on Israel. Barak issued the warning during a recent meeting with the U.S. special envoy to Israel and the PA, Gen. James Jones. The Jerusalem Post quoted defense officials as saying that Barak told Jones: "We need to keep in mind the possibility that after all we have done, Hamas will take over the West Bank, not only by force but even in the upcoming general elections. This is certainly a possibility." Barak plans to present a list of Israeli concessions to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Sunday. Ha'aretz reported that Secretary Rice plans to hold two trilateral meetings during her visit: One American-Israeli-Palestinian conclave will deal with the final-status negotiations, while the other will address the situation on the ground in the West Bank and what both sides are doing to fulfill their obligations under the Roadmap. Headlines in the leading Internet news site Ynet: "Rice Arrives on Reprimand Visit"; in Ha'aretz: "U.S. Increases its Involvement: Rice Arrives for Three-Way Meeting"; and in Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "Assad Presents: Split Arab Conference."

Ha'aretz quoted senior PA sources as saying that Hamas militants who recently returned to Gaza after training in Iran have a detailed plan for upgrading the capabilities of the rockets being developed in the Strip. Yediot cited the belief of Israeli defense sources that Syria is trying to thwart Egypt's efforts to reach understandings between Hamas and Israel, in order to distract attention from the Arab League summit in Damascus, which Egypt and Saudi Arabia are boycotting.

Major media reported that on Thursday Arab foreign ministers re-endorsed the 2002 Saudi initiative that promises Arab recognition of Israel should it withdraw in full from the territories captured in 1967. The proposal was ratified in Damascus during the preparation for Saturday's Arab summit, despite proposals by some

Arab elements to withdraw or modify the initiative. Ha'aretz reported that Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa recently raised the possibility of withdrawing the Arab peace blueprint at the Damascus summit if Israel continues to ignore it.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted a senior hydrologist in Israel's Water Authority that there has been a steep increase in illegal water drilling in the PA. The hydrologist was quoted as saying that this damages the aquifer. The newspaper reported that Israel continues to send large quantities of water to the Palestinians.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Sergey Brin of Google and Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, as well as Barbra Streisand, Rupert Murdoch, Steven Spielberg, as well as past and present international politicians, will attend President Shimon Peres' May 13-15 conference -- "Facing Tomorrow" -- marking 60 years of Israel's independence.

Israel Radio reported that Israeli-Arab MK Ahmed Tibi left for Yemen at the invitation of President Saleh in order to discuss a conciliation between Fatah and Hamas. The radio reported that Tibi told the London newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi that the Arabs of Israel supported the Yemenite initiative. He called on the Arab League convening in Damascus to adopt the initiative. On Sunday the Yemeni University will mark Land Day, and Ahmed Tibi will be guest of honor.

The Jerusalem Post ran a feature about the reconstruction work on the Hurva Synagogue in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, which was destroyed by the in the 1948 war.

Major media reported that on Thursday the Tel Aviv District Court stripped former strategic affairs minister Avigdor Lieberman of his attorney-client privilege. The court said that classified material indicate that Lieberman's actions (as a cabinet minister and in a private capacity) have been "tainted by more than a tinge of criminality."

In an interview with The Jerusalem Post, outgoing Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council on Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories recognizes the frustrations that lead to acts of terror and accepts the UN's decision not to address Palestinian violations of Israelis' human rights. Dugard does not "wish to minimize the terror to which the people of Sderot have been subjected."

Leading media reported on the Justice Ministry's decision to deny the title of university to the Ariel College (in the West Bank)

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported on Jewish-American actress Debra Winger's recent visit to Israel, where she helps to promote bilingual Hebrew-Arabic schools. Ha'aretz reported that Winger met with Israeli-Arab writer and Ha'aretz columnist Sayed Kashua.

Yediot reported that for the first time in Israeli history, President Shimon Peres on Thursday appointed a Druze military secretary -- Hasson Hasson.

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The Jerusalem Post cited an announcement made by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) on Thursday that IAI generated \$3.3 billion in sales in 2007, an increase of 18% from 2006.

Ha'aretz reported that almost 100 years after its establishment sparked a heated debate over using European languages in education, the Technion announced on Thursday the opening of its first-ever program of study in English -- an MBA program.

On Thursday Israel Radio published the results of a Shvakim-Panorama poll conducted on March 26:

Q: If general elections were to be held today, for which party would you vote? Results in Knesset seats:

Likud: 26 [current strength: 12]; Labor Party: 19 [current strength: 19]; Kadima: 16 [current strength: 29]; Yisrael Beiteinu: 11 [current strength: 11]; Shas: 11 [current strength: 10]; Arab parties: 10 [current strength: 10]; National Union Party and National-Religious Party: 8 [current strength: 9]; Meretz: 6 [current strength: 5]; United Torah Judaism: 6 [current strength: 6]; Social Justice, headed by Arkady Gaidamak: 3 [current strength: 0]; Pensioners Party: 0 [current strength: 7].

As the media marked the second anniversary of PM Ehud Olmert's accession to power, Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll:

Has there been a change in your support for Olmert since he entered office?

It is lower: 49%; it has not changed: 44%; it has gone up: 5%.

If your support has declined, what was the cause?

The war in Lebanon: 31%; his general performance: 21%; the Qassam rockets: 15%; the real estate affairs: 11%; his personality: 8%; lack of credibility: 6%; negotiations with the Palestinians: 3%

The poll shows that the most popular PMs in Israeli history are

currently those who made peace: Menachem Begin (34%) and Yitzhak Rabin (32%). Ariel Sharon comes third, with 16%. Olmert is only credited with 1% of support.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "We already are in a mini-crisis with the Americans; Barak is the point man in it, and we must cool down [our enthusiasm]."

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "It would be better if the Palestinians did not see the [targeted killings] in Bethlehem as the essence of Israeli policy."

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The question now is whether [a show of disrespect from the Arab leaders] will only help push Assad deeper into an Iranian embrace, or make him better understand the growing price he (and his country) will pay for that alliance."

The Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The launching of an interfaith dialogue by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is a remarkable development that should be warmly welcomed by the Jewish people...."

[But] the Saudis cannot demand that Muslims stick together while attempting to drive Jews apart."

Block Quotes:

I. "Does Barak Have to Prove his Commitment to Peace?"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/28): "The sharpest criticism [hurled at Ehud] Barak is on the diplomatic level. He was supposed to head the peace camp and has become the national refusenik. He thwarts easing restrictions for the Palestinians, disregards the diplomatic negotiations, and by-passes Olmert and Livni [on the Right].... [But] all of a sudden he authorizes some measures, assistance, armored vehicles, Kalashnikov rifles, and police training in Jordan. He meets with Salam Fayyad.... He authorized them with a frown, without grace, as a preparation for Condoleezza Rice's visit next week and George Bush's later. We already are in a mini-crisis with the Americans; Barak is the point man in it, and we must cool down [our enthusiasm]."

II. "Do Not Reignite the Flame"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (3/28): "[Ehud] Barak leads a party that waved the banner of advancing the peace process with the Palestinians. But in practice, he has adopted a pessimistic and suspicious attitude toward the talks with the Palestinian Authority. Skepticism might be in order, but the problems begin when the Defense Minister turns it into a reason for inaction. On Wednesday, Barak hosted PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad at his home and scattered promises about gestures to West Bank residents. In practice, however, Israel is still moving disturbingly slowly to fulfill its obligations, from those of the 2002 Roadmap peace plan to those of the Annapolis conference last November. Past experience teaches that such promises will never be kept as long as army field officers do not receive explicit instructions to fulfill them. Barak must finally take steps to accelerate the diplomatic process and genuinely improve life for residents of the West Bank. It would be better if the Palestinians did not see the [targeted killings] in Bethlehem as the essence of Israeli policy."

III. "No-Show Arab Summit -- a Slap in the Face for Assad"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/28): "[The Arab League] summit will be remembered as a slap in the face to the Syrian dictator from his fellow Arab leaders, a gesture of disrespect that is hard to imagine would ever have been paid under almost any circumstances to his feared and respected father. The question now is whether such a development will only help push Assad deeper into an Iranian embrace, or make him better understand the growing price he (and his country) will pay for that alliance."

IV. "A Saudi Initiative to Be Encouraged"

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/28): "The launching of an interfaith dialogue by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is a remarkable development that should be warmly welcomed by the Jewish people.... Osama bin Laden came from Saudi Arabia, as did most of the 9/11 terrorists. This is not a coincidence. Saudi Arabia remains the seat of the Wahabi strain of Islam.... So for the Saudi king to preach tolerance and dialogue is quite a departure. But it does not

come out of the blue. An analysis released in February by MEMRI [an Israel-based Mideast media research institute] found that 'in recent years, Saudi Arabia has been making intense efforts to fight both terrorism and its religious and ideological underpinnings.... [However,] the Saudis have said that they are interested in Jewish participation in the new dialogue, but don't want anyone involved in 'oppressing Palestinians.' If this is code for excluding all Israelis, Jewish invitees should refuse to participate. The reason for this is simple: It is not possible to have a dialogue with the Jewish people that deliberately excludes the Jewish state. The first step of tolerance and understanding is to accept that the Jews are a people, that Israel is the Jewish state, and that the denial

of Jewish national rights not only constitutes anti-Semitism, but the most virulent form of anti-Semitism today.... The Saudis cannot demand that Muslims stick together while attempting to drive Jews apart. No less to the point, they cannot combat militant forms of jihad while kowtowing to a major objective of that jihad -- Israel's destruction. An attempt to dialogue with Jews, but not Israelis, will rightly be seen as a classic case of the 'new anti-Semitism,' with the supposed embrace of Jews as cover for delegitimizing Israel. The Saudis, if they want their campaign to tame jihad to be effective, must not fall into this trap -- and if they do, Jewish leaders should not fall into it with them."

JONES